

The Identity of the Exiles

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[0 : 0 0] to that passage from 1 Peter chapter 2 and let's pray together as we come to God's word! Father we want to be those who don't just hear your word and forget it but those who hear it believe it! and live it so please Lord would you help us to understand it now give us a fresh vision of who we are in Jesus and what you've called us to that we might live and work for your praise and glory. Amen.

Amen. How do you explain to someone who asks you what being a Christian means? What do you say? I hope we'd all say it means far more than being born in a Christian country or being part of a Christian culture and far more than just well I just means I go to church on Sundays. So what does it mean to be a Christian? Is it just a set of doctrines or a creed we believe that we'll say a little later on that that maybe sets us apart from others? Is it a new way of seeing the world that goes beyond the physical to the spiritual and the eternal? Is it a new allegiance to Jesus and a desire to serve him as Lord and to live his way? Well it's all those things actually I want to include all of those but it's something far more than that as well. In our passage from 1 Peter chapter 2 Peter pushes us deeper into what it means to be a Christian and there are elements here that speak of a new way of life a new calling a new allegiance but the passage also tells us where all this starts and where a Christian must root their identity and where is that? Well it is in Christ Jesus. Being in Christ is a phrase Peter will use three times later in the letter but actually it's one the apostle Paul uses 85 times in his letters. 85 times and it means so much more than just believing in Christ it's about the position that we find ourselves in through him and the person we are brought to through the work of Jesus and the calling of God. See as Christians we're not just believers or followers in fact we need to go beyond just being disciples or children of God through faith we are brought into a living vibrant life-bringing relationship with Jesus. A place where we are covered by his blood, covered by his blood, sheltered by his strength, guarded and filled by his spirit, raised by his death, justified by his perfection, accepted by his sacrifice, called by his name, loved and adopted by his father, our future guaranteed by his inheritance. As we think about what it means to be in Christ and to have this calling we need to keep those things in mind. What is a Christian? Well it's being in Christ and everything that goes with it. See Peter describes Christians in a number of ways here doesn't he? Verse 5 he calls us living stones, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood. In verse 9 he describes Christians as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

In verse 10 he says we are the people of God. We'll think through those titles shortly. But if they describe the nature of this new identity we have as Christians, where the passage begins by reminding us of the means by which we have this new identity and that is through Christ himself. As you come to him, the living stone, that's where it all begins.

[3 : 4 8] Now of course we might think that our journey to being a Christian began when we came to him. Maybe you can think of that moment when you went forward in a meeting or you put your hand up or you on your own you prayed that prayer committing yourself to Jesus. But a few lines down in verse 9 we see that this walk of faith, this life of faith being in Christ began when we were chosen.

When we were chosen. And we're not chosen because there's anything in us that made God want to choose us. If you remember being a primary school, my primary school at playtime, we used to have games of football.

And then all the boys would line up against the wall and the two team captains would come out and they'd said I'll have him and I'll have him and I'll have him and I'll have him and I was left at the end going, pick me. Pick me. I may not have much talent but I'm keen. Pick me.

Well there's nothing in us that would make God want to choose us. Instead, scripture tells us that on our own we're deserving of wrath and rejection, judgment and death. And yet, and yet God in his

great love instead chose to show us mercy. Verse 10. Not giving us what we did deserve but giving us his grace that we did not deserve. And it's God's call and his choice of us that brought us to Jesus. It was his spirit who enabled us to hear the gospel and softened our hearts so that we might know the conviction of God's spirit. And so we were drawn by God's call to Jesus, the shepherd of ourselves. But as I said earlier, we're not just called to be followers now.

To be padding on behind the way that Jesus leads. We're drawn into Christ. We're now being built into him like a building is attached to its foundations or in this passage here, the cornerstone. The stone that sets the pattern and shape of the building. It's like spokes being connected to the hub. Spokes floating around on their own are useless. But if they're connected to the hub, then all of a sudden there is strength here. It all starts with Jesus. So on means of our new identity, everything that follows begins with Christ. So before I go on, can I ask you this?

[6 : 04] How important is Jesus to you? Would you say, I love him? Would you say, I love Jesus? Are you so enthralled by his character and awed by his affection for you that sometimes it just goes beyond words? Does his mercy and kindness melt your heart?

Does his willing sacrifice on the cross draw you to him? As you read the gospels, do you long to be there back then sitting at his feet, listening to his voice, sharing a meal with him as those first disciples did?

Someone asks you what you're most looking forward to in the future. Would you say, it's when I get to see Jesus? That's up there. Friends, the extent to which we desire to know more of him will match entirely the extent to which we experience his comfort and his joy and his love.

And that in turn will determine how willing we are to serve him and speak of him. Do you love Jesus? And if your heart is cold, how might you draw that emotion greater to grow in love for him? Jesus is the means of our new identity. Well, what is it? Who are we in Christ? How should we think of ourselves individually and collectively? Well, verse 9, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

[7 : 31] That's who we are in Christ. Let's look at each one of those briefly. A chosen people. I mentioned earlier on the fact that we are chosen. And that isn't something to make us proud and conceited, but something that should humble us.

See, the question isn't, well, what are all the reasons God chose me? And why did he not choose someone else? The question is, why did God choose any of us? As we remembered in our confession, no one is good enough for him.

We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But God's sovereign choice of us does bring us great comfort, doesn't it? It reminds us that our salvation is his work, his choice, not ours.

But what about that second word, a chosen people? Paul is talking about us as Christians as a collective here.

So whilst God calls us individually to him, his aim is to unite all those who trust in Christ into one new people. Two phrases down, he'll call us a nation as well.

[8 : 34] Being in Christ is being united with Christ individually, but then through him, like those spokes joining up to the hub, being united with everyone else who also is in Christ.

People from every tribe and tongue and every culture and nation on the planet. That's why it breaks my heart when there are, even in our own town, certain Christian groups who would assent to the same creed that we'll declare later on, who don't join in, who don't want to work with other Christians.

I don't think denominations are necessarily evil. I think sometimes they can allow difference in style and language of worship that is helpful.

Sometimes it allows people to get on together, to work, to be separate, but to work together, without constantly fighting those arguments about things in the scriptures that are disputable.

How should churches be governed? How much water should be used in baptism? Should there be bishops or just local leaders? What does that look like?

[9 : 39] Well, those kind of things are disputable. We don't need all to agree, so sometimes denominations can be helpful, but ultimately God's people are not meant to be divided. In Christ we are a chosen people, a nation that belongs to him.

Actually, that's another reason why church attendance is not just an optional thing to do when we can fit it in, but something to build our lives around. We need to meet together.

We are a people together. The next phrase raises the stakes even more, doesn't it? We are a royal priesthood. Two key words here. Again, our royalty isn't of natural birth, but because of our supernatural rebirth and adoption brought about by God.

Now we're in Christ where we share his family, we share his dignity, we share his position and rank. He's the King of kings and the Lord of lords, so we share his glory with him, and one day we will be there with him.

Paul writes that if we rise with him, we will also reign with him. Can you imagine that? Reigning with Christ over the new creation. If as a child you ever boasted to one of your friends that your dad was bigger than their dad, had a better job than their dad, was higher in rank than their dad, I think where we are as Christians, we have the greatest father of them all.

[11:05] Something to boast of in Christ, but not about ourselves. Being adopted royalty is not meant to make us proud or lazy, though. It's lounging around as if the world owes us a living, as some royal princes have been known to do across the ages.

It's a royal privilege. It's linked to a role of being a priest. Now think back to the Old Testament, the Old Testament priests. What did they do? Well, they were a people set apart by God to draw close to him in worship, to make sacrifices on behalf of the people, to pray for them.

They were pastors and teachers. They were examples through whom other people could see the glory and goodness of God. Sometimes in Anglican language I get called a priest.

I don't really like that title, partly because it's still linked in people's minds with the idea of priests making sacrifices. We don't have a sacrifice here on a Sunday morning when we share communion.

We remember a sacrifice. Because Jesus is the only one who has ever made a sacrifice able to deal with sin. But according to Peter here, all Christians are priests.

[12:19] It's not that we make a sacrifice to God in that sense of animals being killed or anything like that, but we are called to pray and to serve and to build one another up.

We're to be those who represent God to the world, those whom through the light of Christ should shine. Now that brings great significance to our lives, doesn't it?

And in fact, to every part of it, whether in church or out of church, at work, amongst family and friends. As Christians, we are called to be priests of God, those who are set apart to serve and witness to Jesus, so that others are drawn to him as well.

Is that how you see your life? That's our calling. A royal priesthood. The next phrase adds another description on, not just any old people, but a holy nation.

And notice, if you read the passage carefully, this is something that we are now, but also something that we will be. Verse 5 speaks about being built into a holy priesthood.

[13:28] With Jesus himself as the most important block in that building. The cornerstone which sets the shape and direction and dimensions for the whole building. Speaking of something getting built, well, it's a process, isn't it?

Things get added on. It's a process of learning, of growing into that role. And we all do that. None of us are perfect. We all struggle to control our tongues and our desires.

And that continues no matter how long we have been a Christian. We might be able to look back and say, well, thank God I'm not what I was. But we know if we're honest that none of us are what we need to be.

We're in that process of growing more like Jesus. And we'll keep growing and keep growing up into him. And keep being changed all through our lives.

But it's also true that right now we are a holy nation. For Jesus' finished work on the cross has made us perfect in a legal, definitive sense.

[14:30] Because in Christ now our sins have been forgiven. By his sacrifice we have been washed clean. By his perfect life, those who are in Christ are counted worthy because of his life.

We are now members of a holy nation. This is how God sees us. Has wrapped up in Jesus. The Christian life is therefore a matter of growing up into what we already are.

So who are we? We're chosen, humbled by God's sovereign choice. We are royal, confident in our adoption and identity as children of the King of Kings. We're a priesthood with that divine calling to live and speak in a way that brings others to God.

We are to be holy, rejoicing in the effects of the work of Jesus on our broken, sinful souls. And we're a people, a nation, joined together by our joining to Jesus.

United in him, despite our differences. And by the work of God's Holy Spirit, God takes us as we are with all our failings and weaknesses and brokenness.

[15 : 41] And builds us into something glorious. A spiritual house. A loving family where we're all linked together because we're all linked first of all to Christ.

And we're our witness individually and especially together. Through our lives, our words, our service, our giving, our worship, our welcome. Would all those things glorify and magnify Jesus as he deserves?

That's who we are. That's our identity as Christians. Not just a church family, but a holy family. Not just a random collection of misfits, but a people and a nation.

Not just a religious group, but a holy people. A royal priesthood with Christ as our cornerstone. A people belonging to God. His treasured possession. Doesn't that sound good?

You think of yourself as treasured? That's what Peter says we are today. To Christ, his treasured possession. A people who were once in darkness.

[16 : 45] But who our Heavenly Father has called out of that darkness into his wonderful light. So why have we been called? What purpose does God have for us now?

We are this people for his own possession. Is it just so that we can feel really good about ourselves? Say, hey, my name's Dave. I'm a child of God.

Part of a royal priesthood. It's better than your CV, isn't it? Is that what it's for? Just so we can feel better? No. Peter is hindered at this already when he said that we were to be a holy priesthood.

And the heart of that purpose comes out in verse 9. You're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. God's special possession. Here it is. That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light.

Actually, that was the aim for God in the Old Testament as well with his Old Testament people.

They were supposed to be a light to the other nations. So people would see the God they worship and would come and worship him themselves.

[18 : 06] Sadly, that wasn't the case. God's Old Testament people built up self-satisfied walls. They drew arrogant curtains around themselves and they kept that light within.

Like Jesus' parable, they had a light, a lamp, but they hid it under a bucket. I think for decades the church in this country, large parts of it anyway, has done the same thing.

We've enjoyed the light of Christ. We've found peace in the gospel of Christ. We've felt proud and secure in being chosen and called and adopted. We've tried on occasions to be holy, but sometimes that holiness has been way for thin.

More holier than thou, than holy like God. And so we've sat in our churches on Sundays with everyone heading out through those doors and declaring the praises of the one who saved us and called us and redeemed us.

We've got the light, but we've hid it under a bucket. That's not why God saved us. He saved us to be his witnesses. He adopted us so that we would not just know his love ourselves, but that we would share that love with others.

[19 : 19] He called us to himself so that we might go out and call others to come to Jesus. And so if we're in Christ, if we truly are a Christian, then we are supposed to be a walking, talking, living, giving, serving, loving, faithful witness for our saviour.

And if we're not doing that, then we are failing in our calling. We're putting our light under a bucket. Now, don't be frightened by that.

Not everyone is called or equipped to stand in the town centre on a soapbox or to stand in the middle of the high street handing out flyers to people. Actually, I love doing that.

It may terrify you, but I quite enjoy it. But if we are a Christian, then the very least we need to know is to be able to explain to someone why we are trusting in Jesus and to point them to him as well.

We're all supposed to be witnesses. And actually, we can all do it. If you've ever had a conversation with a friend where you've said, oh, you never guessed what I did yesterday. We went down to this National Trust place.

[20 : 27] We had a brilliant time. You should go. Well, if you can do that, you can tell someone about the good time you had in church on Sunday and the welcome you received. You should come along.

It's the same kind of conversation, isn't it, just on a slightly different topic. If you've ever filled in a form or posted something on Facebook or Twitter or somewhere else saying, oh, you really need to

try this new restaurant.

It's brilliant. Well, surely there is something good about Jesus, who is our true and living bread, that you might be able to post there. And if you've received good gifts from him, peace in this messed up world.

If coming to Jesus has dealt with your guilt. If being in Jesus has given you hope in the face of death. Then when those topics come up. We need to be able to pass those things on with conviction.

And as I said earlier on, the more we are enthralled by Jesus, the more we trust in him, the more we know who we are in Christ. The more time we spend with him in prayer and worship in his word and together.

[21 : 34] The more easily those words come. But won't we be mocked and laughed at, you say? Won't people think we're a bit weird? Maybe.

Maybe. But remember who we are. Chosen, called, forgiven, redeemed, adopted, royal, priestly, holy, spirit-filled children of God, co-heirs with Christ.

Frankly, that is a bit weird, isn't it? It is. It's unusual for anyone to think those things. But that's okay. That's good weird. It's gloriously weird.

Wonderfully unusual. It's something to be joyful about. Not to be ashamed of. And even if we face serious mockery or something far worse in terms of persecution, Peter gives us a reason to stand firm and to shine out.

Verse 6. Here's our last point today. Whoever trusts in him will never be put to shame. Never. Never. Never is a long time, isn't it?

[22 : 39] It's a long time. But such is the greatness of God. But such is the greatness of God. And the value of God. And the value of being in Christ. And the power of our salvation. That you and I, despite our failings, have every confidence that God's peace will remain with us.

That his help will not run out. And the final outcome of history will be exactly what the scriptures tell us. No matter what the world may say, no one can cancel God's promises.

No matter what people do, no one can snatch us out of our father's hands. And no matter how often we fail. Even then, nothing can undo our calling.

Our treasure, our worth, our identity is not based on public opinion or on our own efforts. It's based on the words and works of God. So let's stand firm in them.

For those who trust in Christ are now in Christ. And they will never be put to shame. So as I wrap things up, what do you need to take away from this passage this morning?

[23 : 44] Maybe you're here this morning and you're not really sure where you stand. You don't think you're a Christian yet. But maybe you've been attracted by this certainty and the hope and privileges that come with being a Christian.

If so, then come to him. You are invited. But remember you're not just joining a church. Taking on some kind of religious belief. Remember you're coming to Jesus.

It's himself. Our 321 course starts on Tuesday night. Why don't you come along and get to know Jesus better? Maybe you've been a Christian for a long time.

And right now you just need to recall that new identity in Christ and remember who you are in him. That's a personal thing. But that isn't a task that we can do on our own.

We need one another. so how about making that fresh commitment to be here in church every week maybe once a month to join us on prayer or one of our prayer gatherings on Mondays pushing the boat out and joining a bible study group or finding a prayer partner just one other person you can sit and read the bible with over a coffee once a week and pray for one another don't sit and wait for a moment of great revelation the bible tells us to draw near to god and he will draw near to us or maybe you've realized today you need to be far bolder in declaring your faith to others where there are some practical things you can do to get ready for that i'd love to chat with you about those but why not start by praying maybe for three or four people who you know you spend quite a bit of time with but yet they don't yet know jesus write their names down somewhere put them in the front of your bible and pray for them every day maybe pray for a situation that where you would love to be able to share something of the light of jesus but you're not sure how to do that because as we pray for those things god will open up those doors and give us those opportunities and as you pray that for yourself do be praying for each other that as god's chosen royal holy people we might better declare the praises of him who has brought us out of darkness and into his wonderful light may god bless us and help us to walk his way in christ knowing who we are being a light to the world amen

so